

CHEAP REPOSITORY.

BLACK GILES the Poacher.

WITH THE History of Widow Brown's Apple-Tree.

PART II.



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CHERRY REFORMATION
(23)
BLACK GILES, &c.

I THINK my readers got so well acquainted last month with Black Giles the Poacher, that they will not expect, this month, to hear any great good, either of Giles himself, his wife Rachel, or any of their family. I am sorry to expose their tricks, but it is their fault, not mine. If I pretend to speak about people at all, I must tell the truth. I am sure, if folks would but turn about and mend, it would be a thousand times pleasanter to me to write their histories; for it is no comfort to tell of any body's faults. If the world would but grow good, I should be glad enough to tell of it; but till it really becomes so, I must go on describing it as it is: otherwise, I should only mislead my readers, instead of instructing them.

As to Giles and his boys, I am sure old Widow Brown has good reason to remember their dexterity. Poor Woman! she had a fine little bed of onions, in her neat and well-kept garden; she was very fond of her onions, and many a rheumatism has she caught by kneeling down to weed them in a damp day, notwithstanding the little flannel cloak and the bit of an old mat which Madam Wilson gave her, because the old woman would needs weed in wet weather. Her onions she always carefully treasured up for her Winter's store; for an onion makes a little broth very relishing, and is indeed the only savoury thing poor people are used to get. She had also a small orchard, containing about a dozen apple trees, with which in a good year she has been known to make a couple of barrels of cider, which she sold to her landlord towards paying her rent, besides having a little

keg which she was able to keep back for her own drinking. Well! would you believe it, Giles and his boys marked both onions and apples for their own; indeed, a man who stole so many rabbits from the warren, was likely enough to steal onions for sauce. One day, when the widow was abroad on a little business, Giles and his boys made a clear riddance of the onion bed; and when they had pulled up every single onion, they then turned a couple of pigs into the garden, who, allured by the smell, tore up the bed in such a manner, that the widow, when she came home, had not the least doubt but the pigs had been the thieves. To confirm this opinion, they took care to leave the little hatch half open at one end of the garden, and to break down a bit of a fence at the other end.

I wonder how any body can find in his heart not to pity and respect poor old widows! There is something so forlorn and helpless in their condition, that methinks it is a call on every body, men, women, and children, to do them all the kind services that fall in their way. Surely their having no one to take their part, is an additional reason for kind-hearted people not to hurt and oppress them. But it was this very reason which led Giles to do this woman an hurt.

It happened unluckily for this poor widow that her cottage stood quite alone. On several mornings together (for roguery gets up much earlier than industry) Giles and his boys stole regularly into her orchard, followed by their Jack-asses. She was so deaf that she could not hear the asses if they had brayed ever so loud, and to this Giles trusted, for he was very cautious in his rogueries; since he could not otherwise have contrived to keep out of prison; for though he was almost always suspected,

he had seldom been taken up, and never convicted. The boys used to fill their bags, load their asses, and then march off; and if in their way to the town, where the apples were to be sold, they chanced to pass by one of their neighbours, who might be likely to suspect them, they then all at once began to scream out, "buy my coal!—buy my sand!"

Besides the trees in her orchard, poor Widow Brown had in her small garden one Apple-tree particularly fine; it was a Redstreak, so tempting and so lovely, that Giles's family had watched it with longing eyes, till at last they resolved on a plan for carrying off all this fine fruit in their bags. But it was a nice point to manage. The Tree stood directly under her chamber-window, so that there was some danger that she might spy them at the work. They therefore determined to wait till the next Sunday morning, when they knew she would not fail to be at church. Sunday came, and during service Giles attended. It was a lone house, as I said before, and the rest of the parish were safe at church. In a trice the tree was cleared, the bags were filled, the asses were whipt, the thieves were off, the coast was clear, and all was safe and quiet by the time the sermon was over.

Unluckily, however, it happened, that this tree was so beautiful, and the fruit so fine, that the people, as they used to pass to and from church, were very apt to stop and admire Widow Brown's Redstreak; and some of the farmers rather envied her that in that scarce season, when *they* hardly expected to make a pye out of a large orchard, she was likely to make cider from a single tree. I am afraid, indeed, if I must speak out, she herself rather

let her heart too much upon this tree, and had felt as much pride as gratitude to a good providence for it; but this failing of her's was no excuse for Giles. The covetousness of this thief had for once got the better of his caution; the tree was too completely stripped, though the youngest boy Dick did beg hard that his father would leave the poor old woman enough for a few dumplings, and when Giles ordered Dick in his turn to shake the tree, the boy did it so gently that hardly any apples fell, for which he got a good shake of the stick with which the old man was beating down the apples.

The neighbours on their return from church stopped as usual, but it was—not, alas! to admire the apples, for apples there were none left, but to lament the robbery, and console the widow: mean time the Redstreaks were safely lodged in Giles's hovel under a few bundles of hay which he had contrived to pull from the farmers mow the night before, for the use of his jack asses. Such a stir, however, began to be made about the widow's apple-tree, that Giles, who knew how much his character laid him open to suspicion, as soon as he saw the people safe in church again in the afternoon, ordered his boys to carry each a hatful of the apples and thrust them in at a little casement window which happened to be open in the house of Samuel Price, a very honest carpenter in that parish, who was at church with his whole family. Giles's plan, by this contrivance, was to lay the theft on Price's sons in case the thing should come to be further enquired into. Here Dick put in a word, and begged and prayed his father not to force them to carry the apples to Price's. But all that he got by his begging was

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such a knock as had nearly laid him on the earth.
"What, you cowardly rascal," said Giles, "you
will go and peach I suppose, and get your father
sent to goal."

Poor widow Brown, though her trouble had
made her still weaker than she was, went to church
again in the afternoon; indeed she rightly thought
that trouble was a new reason why she ought to
go. During the service she tried with all her might
not to think of her Redstreaks, and whenever they
would come into her head she took up her prayer
book directly, and so she forgot them a little,
and indeed she found herself much easier when she
came out of the church than when she went in.
Now it happened oddly enough, that on that Sunday,
of all the Sundays in the year, she should call in
to rest a little at Samuel Price's, to tell over again
the lamentable story of the apples, and to consult
with him how the thief might be brought to jus-
tice. But, O reader! guess if you can, for I am
sure I cannot tell you, what was her surprise, when
on going into Samuel Price's kitchen she saw her
own Redstreaks lying in the window! The apples
were of a sort too remarkable for colour, shape,
and size to be mistaken. There was not such ano-
ther tree in the parish. Widow Brown immedi-
ately screamed out, "Tafs-a-day! as sure as can be
here are my Redstreaks; I could swear to them in
any court." Samuel Price, who believed his sons
to be as honest as himself, was shocked and trou-
bled at the sight. He knew he had no Redstreaks
of his own; he knew there were no apples in the
window when he went to church. He did verily
believe them to be the widow's. But how they
came there he could not possibly guess. He called

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for Tom, the only one of his sons who now lived at home. Tom was at the Sunday school, which he had never once missed since Mr. Wilton the Minister had set up one in the parish. Was such a boy likely to do such a deed?

A crowd was by this time got about Price's door, among which was Giles and his boys, who had already taken care to spread the news that Tom Price was the thief. Most people were unwilling to believe it. His character was very good, but appearances were strongly against him. Mr. Wilton, who had staid to christen a child, now came in. He was much concerned that Tom Price, the best boy in his school, should stand accused of such a crime. He sent for the boy, examined, and cross examined him. No marks of guilt appeared. But still though he pleaded *not guilty*, there lay the Redbreaks in his father's window. All the idle fellows in the place, who were likely to have committed such a theft themselves, fell with great vengeance on poor Tom. The wicked seldom give any quarter. "This is one of your sanctified ones!" cried they. "This was all the good that Sunday schools did! For their parts they never saw any good come by religion. Sunday was the only day for a little pastime, and if poor boys must be shut up with their godly books when they ought to be out taking a little pleasure, it was no wonder they made themselves amends by such tricks." Another said, he should like to see parson Wilton's righteous one well whipped. A third hoped he would be clapped in the stocks for a young hypocrite as he was, while old Giles, who thought to avoid suspicion by being more violent than the rest, declared, "that he hoped the young dog would be transported for life."

Mr. Wilton was too wise and too just to proceed against Tom without full proof. He declared the crime was a very heavy one, and he feared that heavy must be the punishment. Tom, who knew his own innocence, earnestly prayed to God that it might be made to appear as clear as the noon-day, and very fervent were his secret devotions on that night.

Black Giles passed his night in a very different manner. He set off as soon as it was dark with his sons and their jack-asses laden with their stolen goods. As such a cry was raised about the apples he did not think it safe to keep them longer at home, but resolved to go and sell them at the next town; borrowing without leave a lame colt out of the moor to assist in carrying off his booty.

Giles and his eldest sons had rare sport all the way in thinking, that while they were enjoying the profit of their plunder, Tom Price would be whipped round the market-place at least, if not sent beyond sea. But the younger boy Dick, who had naturally a tender heart, though hardened by his long familiarity with sin, could not help crying when he thought that Tom Price might perhaps be transported for a crime which he himself had helped to commit. He had had no compunction about the robbery, for he had not been instructed in the great principles of truth and justice. Nor would he therefore, perhaps, have had much remorse about accusing an innocent boy. But though utterly devoid of principle he had some remains of natural feeling and of gratitude. Tom Price had often given him a bit of his own bread and cheese, and once, when Dick was like to be drowned, Tom had jumped into the pond with his cloaths on, and saved his life when he was just sinking: the

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remembrance of all this made his heart heavy. He said nothing; as he trotted bare foot after the asses, he heard his father and brothers laugh at having outwitted the godly ones; and he grieved to think how poor Tom would suffer for his wickedness; yet fear kept him silent; they called him sulky dog, and lashed the asses till they bled.

In the mean time Tom Price kept up his spirits as well as he could. He worked hard all day, and prayed heartily night and morning. "It is true," said he to himself, "I am not guilty of this sin; but let this accusation set me on examining myself, and truly repenting of all my other sins, for I find enough to repent of, though I thank God I did not steal those apples."

At length Sunday came. Tom went to school as usual. As soon as he walked in there was a deal of whispering and laughing among the worst of the boys; and he overheard them say, "Who would have thought it? This is master's favourite! This is Parson Wilfon's sober Tommy! We shan't have Tommy thrown in our teeth again if we go to get a bird's nest, or gather a few nuts on a Sunday." "Your demure ones are always hypocrites," says another. "The still low sucks all the milk," says a third.

Giles's family had always kept clear of the school. Dick indeed had sometimes wished to go; not that he had much sense of sin, or desire after goodness, but he thought if he could once read, he might rise in the world, and not be forced to drive asses all his life. Through this whole Saturday night he could not sleep. He longed to know what would be done to Tom. He began to wish to go to school, but he had not courage; sin is very

cowardly, so on the Sunday morning he went and
sat himself down under the church wall. Mr.
Willson passed by. It was not his way to reject
the most wicked, till he had tried every means to
bring them over, and even then he pitied and
prayed for them. He had indeed long left off
talking to Giles's sons; but seeing Dick sitting by
himself he once more spoke to him, desired him
to leave off his vagabond life, and go with him
into the school. The boy hung down his head,
but made no answer. He did not however either
rise up and run away, or look sulky, as he used
to do. The Minister desired him once more. "Sir,"
said the boy, "I can't go. I am so big I am ashamed."
"The bigger you are the less time you have
to lose." "But, Sir, I can't read." "Then it is
high time you should learn." "I should be a-
shamed to begin to learn my letters." "The
shame is not in beginning to learn them, but in be-
ing contented never to know them." "But, Sir,
I am so ragged!" God looks at the heart and not
at the coat. "But, Sir, I have no shoes and
stockings." "So much the worse. I remember
who gave you both," (here Dick coloured.) "It
is bad to want shoes and stockings, but still if you
can drive your asses a dozen miles without them,
you may certainly walk to school without them."
"But, Sir, the good boys will hate me, and won't
speak to me." "Good boys hate nobody, and
as to not speaking to you, to be sure they will not
keep you company while you go on in your pre-
sent evil courses; but as soon as they see you wish
to reform, they will help you, and pity you, and
teach you, and so come along." Here Mr. Willson
took this dirty boy by the hand, and gently pulled
him forward, kindly talking to him all the way.

Now the whole school stared to see Dick Giles come in! No one however dared to say what he thought. The business went on, and Dick sunk into a corner, partly to hide his rags and partly to hide his sin, for last Sunday's transaction sat heavy at his heart, not because he had stolen the apples, but because Tom Price had been accused! This I say, made him sink behind. Poor boy! he little thought there was One saw him who sees all things, and from whose eye no hole nor corner can hide the sinner.

It was the custom in that school for the master, who was a good and wise man, to mark down in his pocket book all the events of the week, that he might turn them to some account in his Sunday evening instructions, such as any useful story in the newspaper, any account of boys being drowned as they were out in a pleasure-boat on Sundays, any sudden death in the parish, or any other remarkable visitation of Providence, insomuch, that many young people in the place, who did not belong to the school, and many parents also, used to drop in for an hour on a Sunday evening, when they were sure to hear something profitable. The Minister greatly approved this practice, and often called in himself, which was a great support to the master, and encouragement to the people.

The master had taken a deep concern in the story of widow Brown's apple-tree. He could not believe Tom Price was guilty, nor dared he pronounce him innocent; but he resolved to turn the instructions of the present evening to this subject. He began thus: "My dear boys, however light some of you may make of robbing an orchard, yet I have often told you there is no such thing as

is a *single* sin, if it be wilful or habitual. I will now to explain to you also that there is hardly such a thing as a *single*, solitary sin. You know I teach you not merely to repeat the commandments as an exercise for your memory, but as a rule for your conduct. If you were to come here only to learn to read and spell on a Sunday, I should think that was not employing God's day for God's work; but I teach you to read that you may by this means come so to understand the Bible and the Catechism, as to make every text in the one, and every question and answer in the other, to be so fixed in your hearts, that they may bring forth the fruits of good living.

Master. How many commandments are there?

Boy. Ten.

Master. How many did that boy break who stole widow Brown's apples?

Boy. Only one, Master. The eighth.

Master. What is the eighth?

Boy. Thou shalt not steal.

Master. And you are very sure that this was the only one he broke? Now suppose I could prove to you that he probably broke not less than six out of those ten commandments, which the great Lord of heaven himself stooped down from his eternal glory to deliver to men; would you not then think it a terrible thing to steal, whether apples or guineas?

Boy. Yes, Master.

Master. I will put the case. Some wicked boy has robbed widow Brown's orchard. (Here the eyes of every one were turned on poor Tom Price, except those of Dick Giles, who fixed his on the ground.) I excuse no one, continued the master,

Tom Price is a good boy, and was not missing at the time of the robbery; these are two reasons why I presume he is innocent; but whoever it was, you allow that by stealing these apples he broke the eighth commandment.

Boy. Yes, master.

Master. On what day were these apples stolen?

Boy. On Sunday.

Master. What is the fourth commandment?

Boy. Thou shalt keep holy the Sabbath Day.

Master. Does that person keep holy the Sabbath Day who loiters in an orchard on Sunday, when he should be at church, and steals apples when he ought to be saying his prayers?

Boy. No, master.

Master. What command does he break?

Boy. The fourth.

Master. Suppose this boy had parents who had sent him to church, and that he had disobeyed them by not going, would that be keeping the fifth commandment?

Boy. No, master; for the fifth commandment says, Thou shalt honor thy father and thy mother.

This was the only part of the case in which poor Dick Giles's heart did not smite him; for he knew that he had disobeyed no father; for his father, alas! was still wickeder than himself, and had brought him to commit the sin. But what a wretched comfort was this! The master went on.

Master. Suppose this boy earnestly coveted this fruit, though it belonged to another person, would that be right?

Boy. No, master; for the tenth commandment says, Thou shalt not covet.

Master. Very well. Here are four of God's

positive commands already broken. Now do you think thieves ever scruple to use wicked words?

Boy. I am afraid not, master.

Here Dick Giles was not so hardened, but that he remembered how many curses had passed between him and his father while they were filling the bags, and he was afraid to look up. The master went on.

"I will now go one step further. If the thief, to all his other sins, has added that of accusing the innocent to save himself, if he should break the ninth commandment, by bearing false witness against a harmless neighbour, SIX COMMANDMENTS ARE BROKEN FOR AN APPLE! But if it be otherwise, if Tom Price should be found guilty, 'tis not his good character shall save him. I shall shed tears over him, but I punish him I must."—"No, that you shan't," roared out Dick Giles, who sprung from his hiding place, fell on his knees, and burst out crying, "Tom Price is as good a boy as ever lived; it was father and I stole the apples!"

It would have done your heart good to have seen the joy of the master, the modest blushes of Tom Price, and the satisfaction of every honest boy in the school. All shook hands with Tom, and even Dick got some portion of pity. I wish I had room to give my readers the moving exhortation which the master gave. But while Mr. Wilton left the guilty boy to the management of the master, he thought it became him, as a Minister and a Magistrate, to go to the extent of the law in punishing the father. Early on the Monday morning he sent to apprehend Giles; in the mean time Mr. Wilton was sent for to a gardener's house two miles distant, to attend a man who was dying. This was a duty to

which all others gave way in his mind. He let out directly, but what was his surprise on his arrival to see, on a little bed on the floor, poaching Giles lying in all the agonies of death! Jack Weston, the same poor young man against whom Giles had informed for killing a hare, was kneeling by him, offering him some broth, and talking to him in the kindest manner. Mr. Wilson begged to know the meaning of all this, and Jack Weston spoke as follows.

"At four this morning, as I was going out to mow, passing under the high wall of this garden I heard a most dismal moaning. The nearer I came the more dismal it grew. At last, who should I see but poor Giles groaning, and struggling under a quantity of bricks and stones, but not able to stir. The day before he had marked a fine large net on this old wall, and resolved to steal it, for he thought it might do as well to catch partridges as to preserve cherries; so, Sir, standing on the very top of this wall, and tugging with all his might to loosen the net from the hooks which fastened it, down came Giles, net, wall and all, for the wall was gone to decay. It was very high indeed, and poor Giles not only broke his thigh, but has got a terrible blow on his brain, and is bruised all over like a mummy. On seeing me, Sir, poor Giles cried out, 'oh Jack! I did try to ruin thee by lodging that information, and now thou wilt be revenged by letting me lie here and perish. God forbid, Sir,' cried I: thou shalt see what sort of revenge a Christian takes. So, Sir, I sent off the gardener's boy to fetch a surgeon, while I scampered home, and brought on my back this bit of a hammock, which is indeed my own bed, and put Giles upon it, we then lifted him up, bed and all, as tenderly as if he had been a gentleman, and brought him in here. My wife has just brought

him a drop of nice broth, and now, Sir, as I have done what I could for his poor perishing body, it was I who took the liberty to lend to you to come to try to help his poor soul, for the Doctor says he can't live."

Mr. Wallon could not help saying to himself, "Such an action as this is worth a whole volume of comments on that precept of our blessed Master, 'Do good to them that hate you.'" Giles's dying groans confirmed the sad account Weston had just given. The poor wretch could neither pray himself, nor attend to the Minister. He could only cry out, "Oh, Sir, what will become of me? I don't know how to repent. Oh my poor wicked children! Sir, I have bred them all up in sin and ignorance. Have mercy on them, Sir; let me not meet them in the place of torment to which I am going." He languished a few days, and died in great misery.

Except the Minister and Jack Weston, no one came to see poor Giles, besides Tommy Price, who had been so sadly wronged by him. Tom often brought him his own rice milk or apple dumpling, and Giles, ignorant and depraved as he was, often cried out, that he thought now there must be some truth in religion, since it taught even a boy to *deny himself*, and to *forgive an injury*.—Mr. Wallon the next Sunday made a moving discourse on the danger of what are called "petty offences." This, together with the awful death of Giles, produced such an effect, that no Poacher has been able to show his head in that parish ever since. 2.

THE END.

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